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*The Performance of the Intelligence Community
Before the Arab-Israeli War of October 1973:
A Preliminary Post-Mortem Report*

December 1973

Submitted by the
DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

Following Review by the
United States Intelligence Board

Prepared by the
Intelligence Community Staff

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SENSITIVE INTELLIGENCE SOURCES
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THE PERFORMANCE OF THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY
BEFORE THE ARAB-ISRAELI WAR OF OCTOBER 1973:
A PRELIMINARY POST-MORTEM REPORT

NOTE

This is the first of several reports concerning the activities of the Intelligence Community before and during the Arab-Israeli War of October 1973 which will be submitted to the NSCIC by the DCI or his representatives.* This particular study treats a broad variety of topics and examines a substantial number of problems. But it assesses the Community's activities only for that period which preceded the outbreak of war on 6 October, and is subject to the limits imposed by the press of time, the availability of data, and the recency of the events examined. Additional data and further consideration of it may yet yield new perceptions and amended judgments.

**For purposes of this paper, the term Community indicates those organizations which are represented at USIB and which are normally responsible for the collection of intelligence information and/or the production of finished intelligence, i.e., CIA, DIA, State/INR, and NSA.*

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PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There was an intelligence failure in the weeks preceding the outbreak of war in the Middle East on 6 October. Those elements of the Intelligence Community responsible for the production of finished intelligence did not perceive the growing possibility of an Arab attack and thus did not warn of its imminence.

The information provided by those parts of the Community responsible for intelligence collection was sufficient to prompt such a warning. Such information (derived from both human and technical sources) was not conclusive but was plentiful, ominous, and often accurate.

2. Our post-mortem survey suggests that there were errors of evaluation among all producing offices. These can be attributed, in part, to attitudes and preconceptions lying behind the analysis, and also to various systemic problems affecting the analytical effort.

Certain substantive preconceptions, reinforced by official Israeli interpretations, turned the analyst's attention principally toward political indications that the Arabs were bent on finding non-violent means to achieve their objectives and away from indications (mainly military) to the contrary.

It is true, of course, that the analyst was faced with the tremendously demanding task of discriminating between the good and the bad in the flow of information crossing his desk. And the machinery of which he is a part did not always make his task any easier or provide him with systematic ways to challenge the quality of his own assessments.

3. We preliminarily recommend that: (a) efforts be made to further attune aspects of the collection system to the needs of the analytical systems; (b) regular systems be established to encourage analysts to exchange views and challenge consensus and to improve their ability to evaluate data; (c) the Community's warning system be revamped and the language of its issuances be designed to clearly reflect degrees of probability; (d) the Community consider the advisability of adopting a coherent national family of products for publication during periods of crisis; and (e) the Community provide for continuing assessments of the handling of intelligence during crises and potential crises. (These recommendations are given fuller treatment in Section V, p. 21 ff.)

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4. Finally, our preliminary post-mortem report has some implications for the general problem of resource allocation within the Community. If it is true in this instance that the collection effort was generally adequate but that our analytical effort was deficient, then a program to improve the latter will oblige us to try to augment the quantity, improve the environment, and add to the quality of the manpower which devotes itself to the production of finished intelligence. This in turn might require us to find additional resources, and these might have to be drawn in part from other areas of effort within the Community.

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I. KEY QUESTIONS

The performance of the Intelligence Community during the period preceding the outbreak of the recent war in the Middle East has been subjected to serious and persistent criticism. Specifically, it is charged that the Community: (1) misinterpreted the attitudes and motives of the Arabs toward each other, toward Israel, and toward the big powers; (2) misestimated both Arab and Israel military capabilities, inaccurately downgrading the former and excessively exalting the latter; (3) misread a series of political and military developments, particularly during the summer and fall; and (4) as a consequence of all this, misinterpreted Arab intentions in September and early October.

This paper addresses these charges. In the process, an effort is made to provide preliminary answers to several key questions:

- A. Was there, in fact, an intelligence failure during the period leading up to the hostilities, and, if so, what was the nature of that failure? (This is addressed in Section II, THE COMMUNITY'S PERFORMANCE.)
- B. As background and documentation for A. (above), what information, specifically, did the various intelligence agencies receive (from various collection efforts) and what, specifically, did they produce as finished, analytical intelligence during the period in question? (Section III, THE COLLECTION EFFORT.)
- C. If the notion of failure is indeed substantiated in the preceding sections, the question then must be, essentially, what happened? What, in other words, were the principal reasons for the failure, as best we can identify at this early date? (Section IV, THE ANALYTICAL EFFORT.)
- D. Again assuming serious shortcomings in the Community's performance, can we identify some possible remedies and in this way help to avoid similar problems in the future? (Section V, PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS.)

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II. THE COMMUNITY'S PERFORMANCE

The problem of whether there was or was not an intelligence "failure" concerning the Middle East in 1973 can be subdivided into three primary questions:

(1) Were intelligence analysts given enough information in time to conclude (before 6 October) that the possibility of war was sufficiently serious to justify some form of warning to intelligence consumers? *Yes, Community analysts were provided with a plentitude of information which should have suggested, at a minimum, that they take very seriously the threat of war in the near term.* Though not conclusive, and though much of it could be explained away as signifying a rehearsal rather than the main event, data from a variety of sources indicated in September that something very big was brewing in both Egypt and Syria. (See the discussion of the Collection Effort in Section III.) This, together with a general awareness (confirmed again in the spring of this year) that Sadat wished to keep his military options open, should have led the analysts to assign far more weight to the possibility that Sadat's intentions were hostile.

(2) Assuming that the information made available to them did indeed seem to warrant or demand such forewarning, did the analysts in fact effectively utilize it? *No, as indicated, the assessments which appeared in various intelligence periodicals, spot reports, and memoranda, did not sufficiently utilize the information available and consequently did not provide a warning of impending hostilities.* A thorough search of the material issued prior to 6 October has failed to turn up any official statement from any office or committee responsible for producing finished, analytical intelligence which contributed anything resembling a warning; *qua* warning.

There was some rather timid cautionary advice, of the sort, emphasized below, in quotations from two assessments:

"We continue to believe that an outbreak of major Arab-Israeli hostilities remains unlikely for the immediate future, although the risk of localized fighting has increased slightly as the result of the buildup of Syrian forces in the vicinity of the Golan Heights. Egyptian exercise activity under way since late September may also contribute to the possibility of incidents."

—Combined Watch Report of the USIB, No. 1206, 4 October 1973.

"There are reports that Syria is preparing for an attack on Israel but conclusive evidence is lacking. In our view, the political climate in the Arab states argues against a major Syrian military move against

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Israel at this time. *The possibility of a more limited Syrian strike—perhaps one designed to retaliate for the pounding the Syrian Air Force took from the Israelis on September 13—cannot, of course, be excluded.*"

—INR Memorandum to the Secretary, 30 September 1973.

But these qualifications deal only with the possibility of small-scale military actions. They thus could not have served as warnings of major hostilities even had they been far less diffident than they in fact were.

(3) If analysts did not provide forewarning, what did they offer in its stead? *Instead of warnings, the Community's analytical effort in effect produced reassurances.* That is to say, the analysts, in reacting to indicators which could be interpreted in themselves as portents of hostile Arab actions against Israel, sought in effect to reassure their audience that the Arabs would not resort to war, at least not deliberately. Thus:

"Syria-Egypt- The movement of Syrian troops and Egyptian military readiness are considered to be coincidental and not designed to lead to major hostilities."

—DIA Intelligence Summary, 3 October 1973.

"Egypt- The exercise and alert activities under way in Egypt may be on a somewhat larger scale and more realistic than previous exercises, but they do not appear to be preparing for a military offensive against Israel."

—Central Intelligence Bulletin, 5 October 1973.

"Egypt- The current, large-scale mobilization exercise may be an effort to soothe internal problems as much as to improve military capabilities. Mobilization of some personnel, increased readiness of isolated units, and greater communication security are all assessed as parts of the exercise routine....there are still no military or political indicators of Egyptian intentions or preparations to resume hostilities with Israel."

—DIA Intelligence Summary, 6 October 1973.

"Israel-Egypt-Syria- Both the Israelis and the Arabs are becoming increasingly concerned about the military activities of the other, although neither side appears to be bent on initiating hostilities....For Egypt a military initiative makes little sense at this critical juncture....Another round of hostilities would almost certainly destroy Sadat's painstaking efforts to invigorate the economy and would run

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counter to his current efforts to build a united Arab political front, particularly among the less militant, oil-rich states. For the normally cautious Syrian president, a military adventure now would be suicidal, and he has said so."

—Central Intelligence Bulletin, 6 October 1973.

"The Watch Committee met in special session at 0900 on 6 October 1973 to consider the outbreak of Israeli-Arab hostilities.... We can find no hard evidence of a major, coordinated Egyptian/Syrian offensive across the Canal and in the Golan Heights area. Rather, the weight of evidence indicates an action-reaction situation where a series of responses by each side to perceived threats created an increasingly dangerous potential for confrontation. The current hostilities are apparently a result of that situation.... It is possible that the Egyptians or Syrians, particularly the latter, may have been preparing a raid or other small-scale action."

—Special Report of the Watch Committee, 6 October 1973.

There were many reasons why the intelligence analysis which reached the consumers conveyed these essentially reassuring messages, not all of them good. But surely it will be recalled, as analytical shortcomings are identified in this paper, that the hindsight of the post-mortem process bestows an element of wisdom which is denied those—in this instance intelligence analysts—who must deal in foresight. Indeed, what may seem so clear now did not, could not, seem so clear then.

Still, there is no gainsaying the judgment that, whatever the rationale, the principal conclusions concerning the imminence of hostilities reached and reiterated by those responsible for intelligence analysis were—quite simply, obviously, and starkly--wrong.

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III. THE COLLECTION EFFORT

In intelligence jargon, the principal categories of the effort to obtain (collect) information are HUMINT (human sources: clandestine, military, and diplomatic), SIGINT (encompassing communications [COMINT] and electronic intelligence [ELINT]), and PHOTINT (including satellite photography). A post-mortem survey of collection activities in these three areas of acquisition during the crisis period reveals that there were problems which were peculiar to each country involved, and which in the aggregate affected the quality, dissemination, and ultimate value of the data collected. But there were no major weaknesses or uncompensated omissions in the overall effort. In particular, information concerning, for example, the kinds and numbers of weapons in the Arab inventory was adequate (though the effectiveness of some Soviet weapons--e.g., the SA-6, which had not previously been observed in combat--came as something of a surprise).

[REDACTED] Some HUMINT too should be counted as quite good.

Intelligence From Human Sources

Specifically concerning clandestine reporting, it is apparent (at least in retrospect) that [REDACTED] in late September gave a clear indication of impending hostilities.

[REDACTED] Syrian Army units are expected to be in position by the end of September.

[REDACTED] Missiles and antiaircraft units are deployed close to the front lines to support the attack at zero hour.

[REDACTED] Cities, particularly Damascus, are in the process of taking all possible civil defense precautions.

E.O. 12958, as amended
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